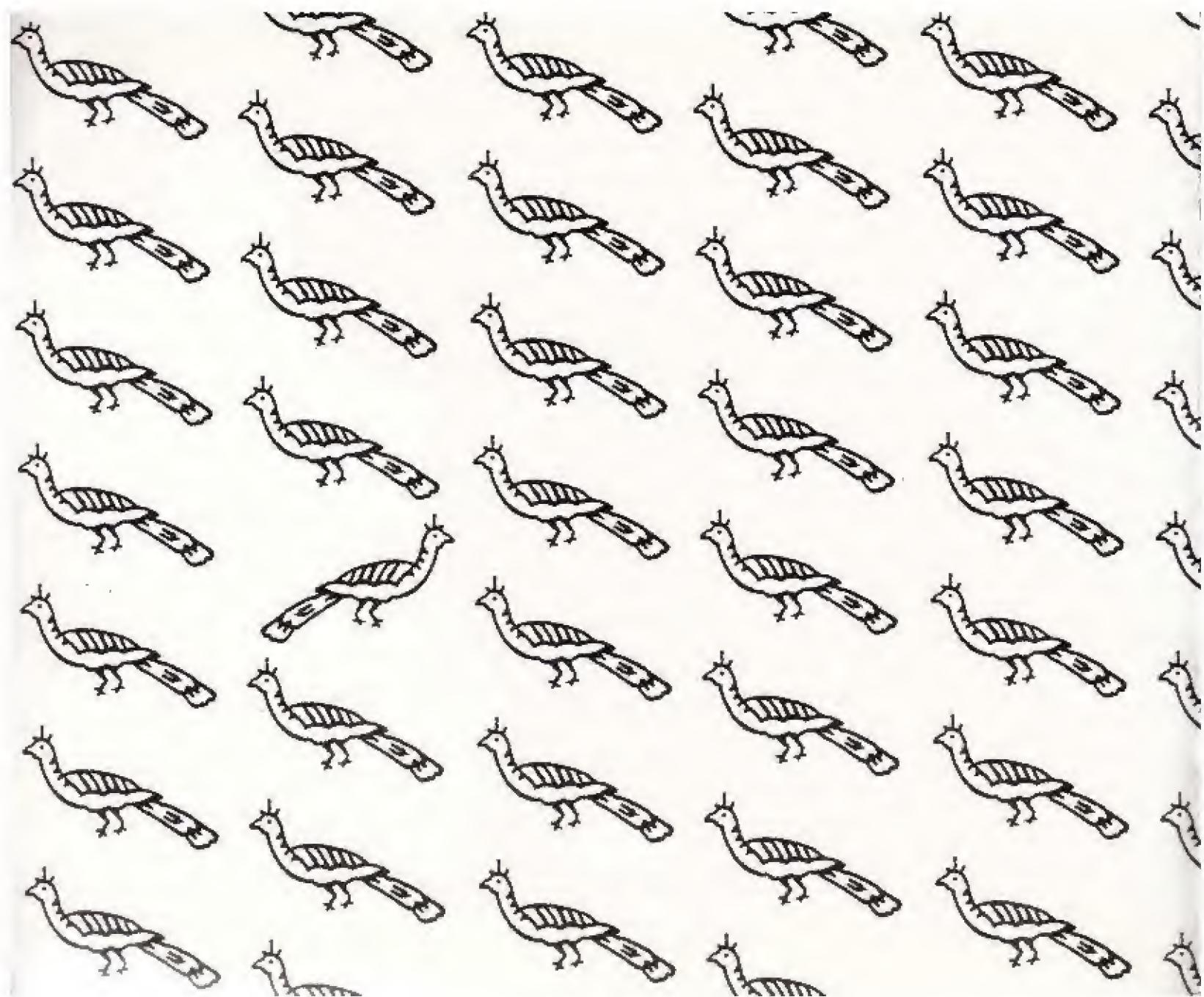


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by Vayu Naidu
art by Mugdha Shah

a folktale from rajasthan
Eyes on the peacock's tail







Eyes on the Peacock's Tail a story from Rajasthan

Magic Vessels a story from Tamil Nadu

Hiss, Don't Bite! a story from Bengal

A Curly Tale a story from Bihar

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There was a time when all the animals in the jungle got together to choose a leader. There were ministers like Jackal, Wild Boar, and occasionally Camel, who towered above them all. But Rabbit, Deer, Snake, Bear, Monkey and others felt they needed a leader who would hold everyone together.

Elephant trumpeted hrrrump! All the animals rushed to where she stood beside the waterhole. They were greeted with a shower of water.

“You be our leader,” they said to Elephant.

“Oh no!” she said. “I am a vegetarian. You need someone who can fight foes!”

Just then Lion roared whaaaahwh! It made all the animals shiver with excitement. But when they went close to him, his stinky breath threw them off. No, he wouldn't do. They needed a leader who smelled good. So off they scurried, worried that no one was quite up to the job.





The animals came to a part of the jungle where old Banyan stood. He saw everything and told many stories. There the sun made lovely patterns of light on the forest floor.

Peacock strutted out from behind Banyan. He was the very first peacock of creation. He was a gorgeous purple, his tail a shimmering green with no markings. Peacock fanned out his long tail in a wide wide arch. He looked like a king!

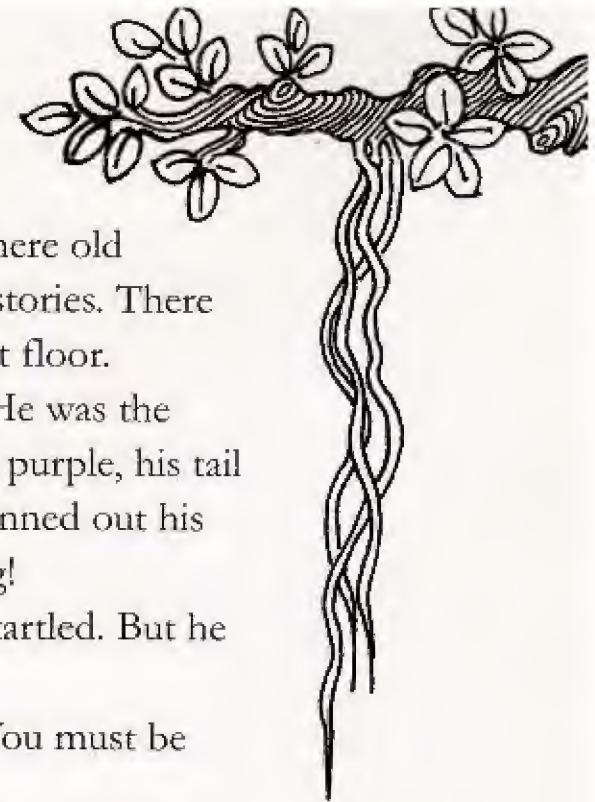
"Yes!" chorused the animals. Peacock was startled. But he pretended to show no surprise.

Jackal spoke clearly. "You are so beautiful. You must be wise too. Will you be our leader?"

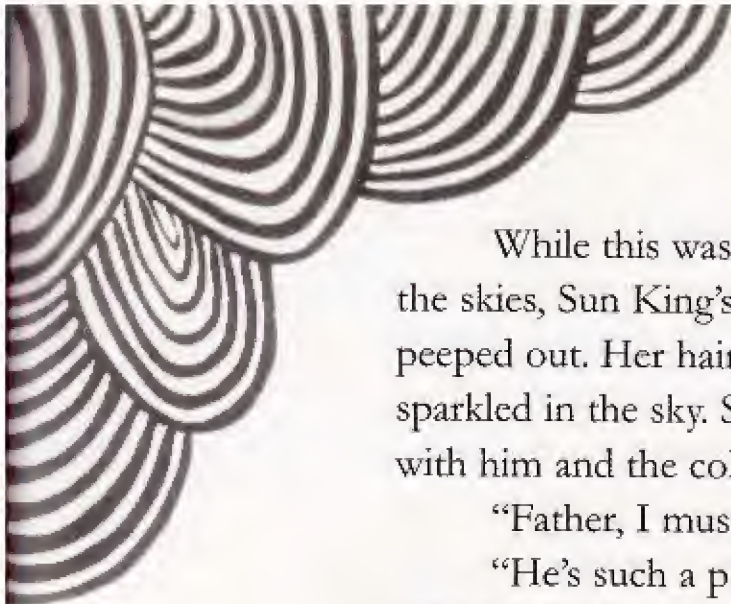
"Yes!" Peacock squawked. "But what do I have to do?"

"Oh, nothing," Crow said. "leave it to us. You only need to agree." The other animals wondered what she meant. "Or disagree with what the ministers say," she quickly added.

"Very well," said Peacock. He thought, "Oh good! That's easy then. I can continue looking for juicy worms."







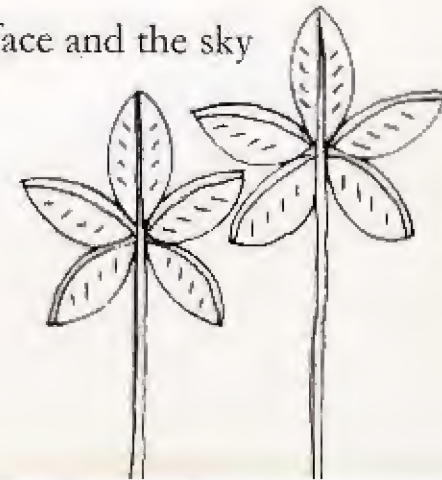
While this was happening down in the jungle, way up in the skies, Sun King's daughter Surya parted the clouds and peeped out. Her hair was like a halo of flames. She glowed and sparkled in the sky. Surya saw Peacock. She fell instantly in love with him and the colours he spread in the forest.

"Father, I must marry Peacock," she said.

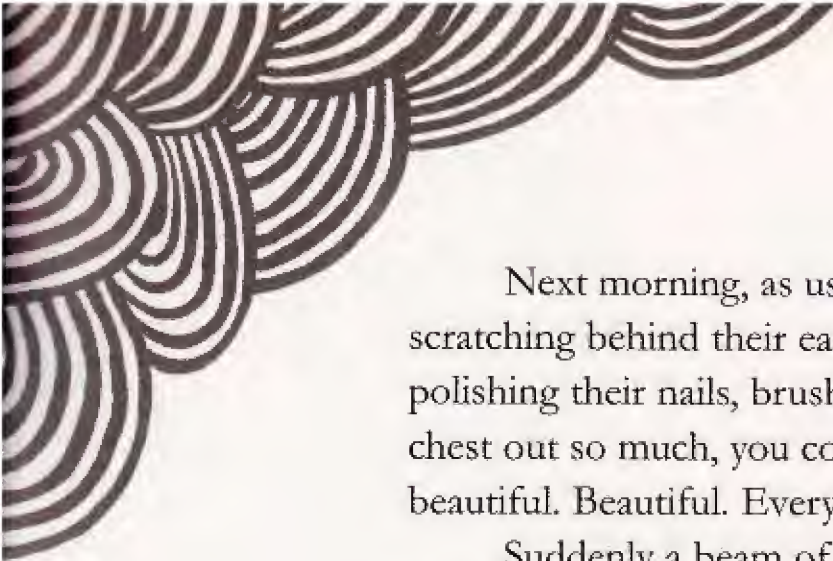
"He's such a proud fellow," her father replied. "He only cares for his looks. A clever girl like you would get bored with that! Why don't you choose someone who is equal to you?"

The princess wept and said: "Father, just because he is a bird of the jungle you think he's useless. But see, all the animals have chosen him as their leader."

Clouds began to gather on Sun King's face and the sky turned dark and gloomy.








Next morning, as usual, the animals were busy ... scratching behind their ears, licking their young ones clean, polishing their nails, brushing their tails. Peacock stuck his chest out so much, you couldn't see his head. But he was beautiful. Beautiful. Everyone stopped and stared at him.

Suddenly a beam of light shone brightly from sky. A deep voice announced: "Sun King invites Peacock to marry his only daughter Princess Surya!"

Peacock nearly choked on the worm in his beak. A golden chariot appeared. Rays of light lifted Peacock into the chariot. Up and away the chariot rose, into the sky.

"This is nice," Peacock said as the wind ruffled his feathers.

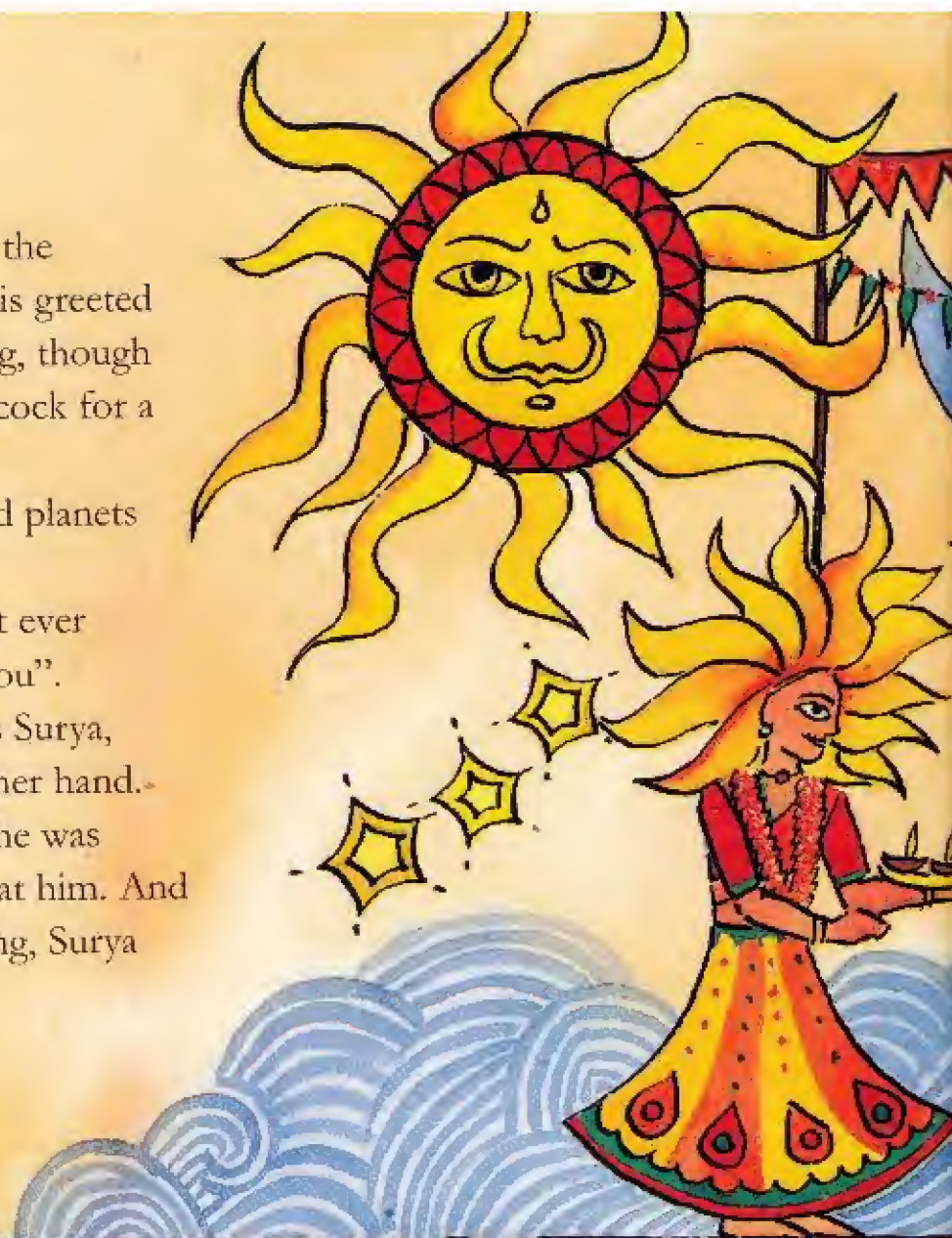


The chariot came to a halt in the clouds. The music of many shehnais greeted Peacock. "Welcome!" said Sun King, though he wasn't pleased at all to have Peacock for a son-in-law.

Moon came with his stars and planets danced. A huge feast was laid out.

Peacock pecked away without ever lifting up his head to say "Thank you".

At the far end stood Princess Surya, holding a garland of marigolds in her hand. Peacock looked this way and that: he was surprised that no one was looking at him. And before he knew what was happening, Surya and Peacock were married.



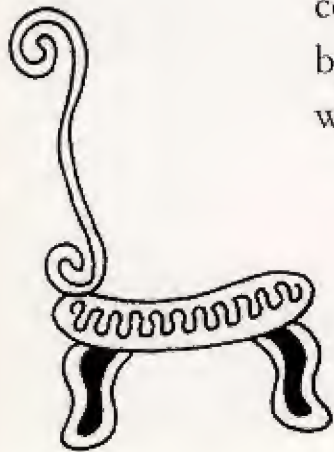


Sun King said without a smile, "Here's a glass palace and a special throne. Every morning Peacock may fan out his green tail and the kingdom will reflect his colours."

After the wedding, Peacock said to his bride: "When I am awake you must be awake too. When I am asleep make sure you polish the floors so that I can see myself when I walk. Cook, clean, and stay beautiful."

Surya agreed. She thought Peacock was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen. "And he belongs to me," she said happily.

The days flew by and the animals in the jungle wondered what on earth had happened to their newly-elected leader. Of course, they were very proud that Peacock was being honoured by Sun King. They asked Banyan who knew everything. But he would not stir a leaf to their questions. They decided to wait.





As time went by, Peacock grew fatter and lazier. Surya's maids served him delicious foods while she polished and shined the palace. Surya was quite unhappy. Peacock seemed to be having so much fun while he was awake. At night he snored so loudly, it drove her out of the palace.

A month passed. "Time to see how Surya is getting along," Sun King said to himself. "Let me pay her a visit."

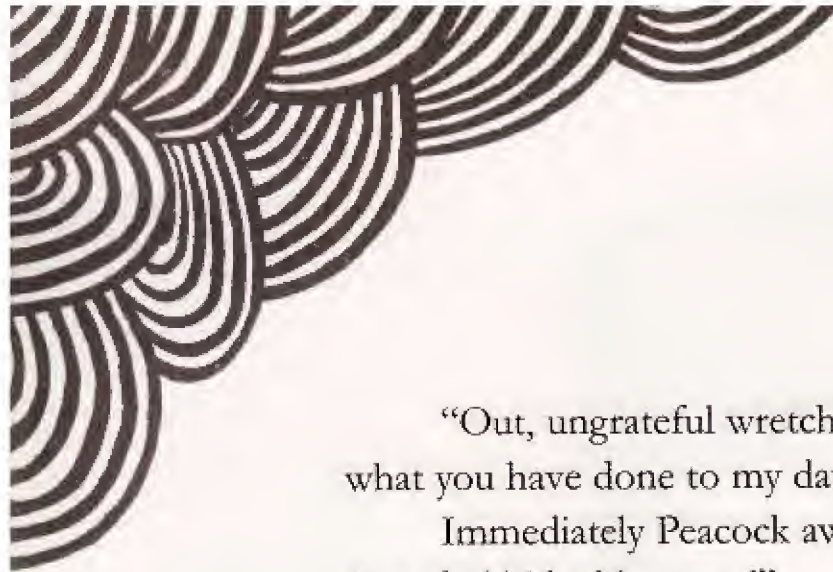
When he entered the palace he was surprised to find how dark and cold it was. "This is strange!" he thought as he walked quietly to the throne room. "What is this funny sound?" he asked himself. "This funny whistling sound. It comes and goes."

Sun King saw that Peacock was on the throne. He had grown fat beyond recognition. He was fast asleep, snoring! Beside the throne Sun King saw a heap of cloth.

"What's this?" he asked and touched the cloth. It was his beloved Surya grown weak and thin.







“Out, ungrateful wretch!” Sun King shouted. “Look what you have done to my daughter!”

Immediately Peacock awoke and shouted, “Guards! Intruder! Take him away!”

Rays of sunlight streaked into the room and - to Peacock’s horror - whisked Peacock right out of the palace!

Back on earth, the animals were busy cleaning their paws and scratching behind the ears. Suddenly, whoosh! Out of the clouds hurtled a shadow and landed with a thud in their midst. The golden chariot raced back into the clouds.



“What’s this? What’s this?” the animals cried. Peacock wobbled across the uneven ground. he sulked and hid behind Banyan. Cheetah rolled on the ground and laughed. He said: “You see, Peacock was such a proud silly fellow, even Sun King who is so kind threw him out!”

Bzz bzz bzz! went the animals, gossiping about what could have happened to Peacock. “It’s getting late,” Elephant said. “Let’s choose another leader.”

“Yes!” the animals shouted.

Only Peacock sat alone, grumbling. “Everybody has used me!” he said. “Look at me, I have no beauty left.”



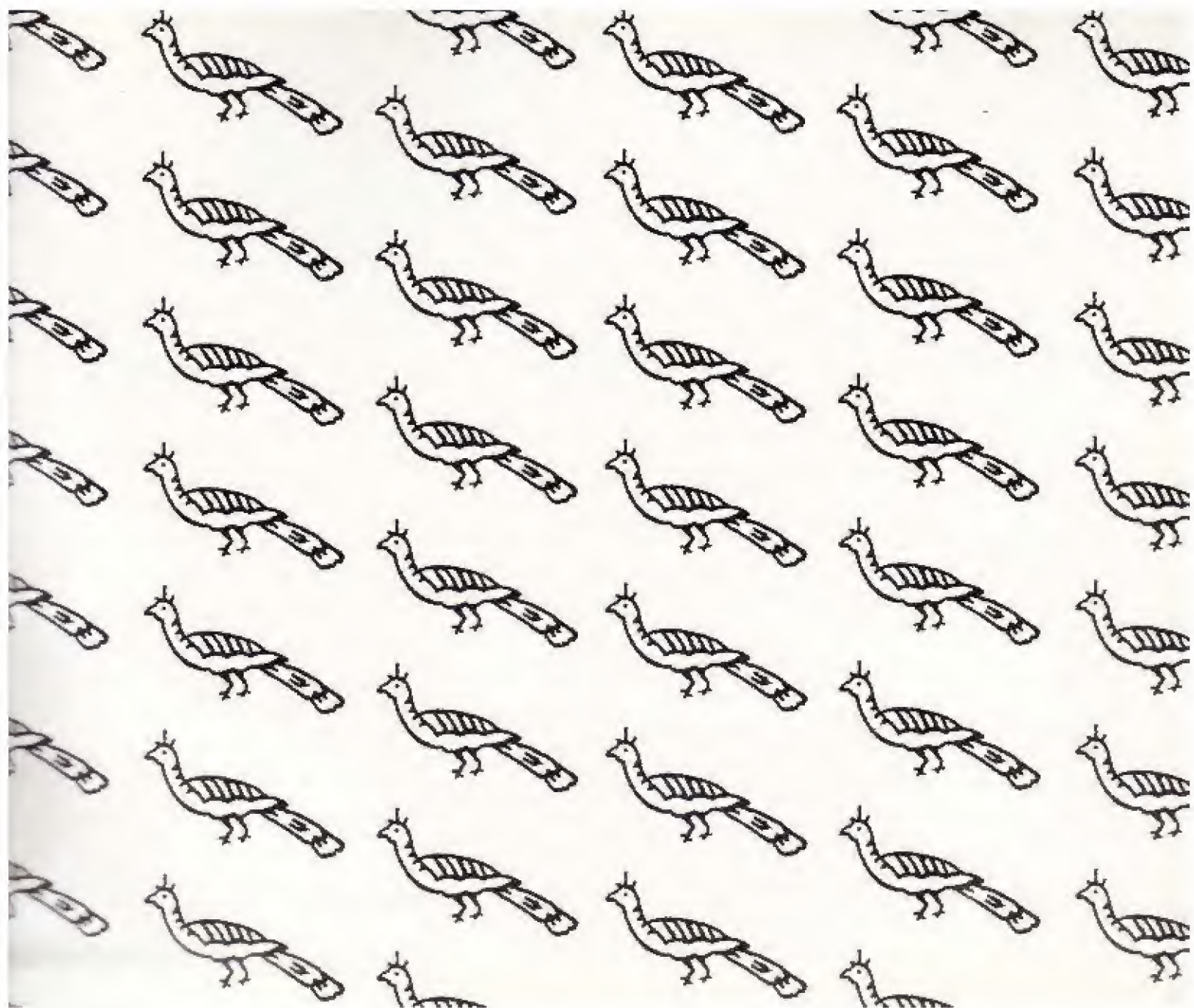


At that moment Surya peeked out from behind the clouds. She saw Peacock. "He was beautiful but oh-so stuffed with pride. And I was oh-so foolish," she thought. Hot, angry tears rolled down her cheeks. As each teardrop fell, a ring of dust collected around it. The tears fell - plop! - on Peacock's tail and the rings of dust made tiny black circles. Like eyes. Peacock tried to wash them off, but they would not go.

In Rajasthan, people believe that Peacock is still being watched from the skies to see that he behaves himself. And so, from that day to this, it is said Peacock has eyes on his tail! At least, that's what Banyan tells us when we rest in his shade.







for kids
5+

under the banyan Many things happen under the banyan. Weary travellers rest in its shade, wise men meditate, villagers sit together to settle disputes. They also listen to stories. This is a series of folk stories from different parts of India. The medium of "book and tape" brings alive the folktale alongwith the colours and music of the region.

Eyes on the Peacock's Tail, the first in this series, is from Rajasthan. In the beginning the peacock had no markings on its shimmering blue-green tail. This story tells you how the peacock's tail got decorated with eyes.

Dr Vayu Naidu is a writer, storyteller and performer. She was awarded Europe's first PhD in performance oral traditions from India at the University of Leeds. She has performed at storytelling, literature and music festivals in Greece, Sweden, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and India.

Mugdha Shah did the illustrations and design as part of her diploma project for the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, where she is a student of Graphic Design. This is her first book for children.



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This book not to be sold separately.

The illustrations are adapted from a traditional style called path, popular in Rajasthan. Path paintings are done on cloth and tell the story of a hero called Pabuji. A storyteller unfurls the cloth and, to the accompaniment of cymbals and stringed instruments, narrates the story to wide-eyed listeners. Each path cloth has a little box in it which carries the painter's name, place, date, the storyteller's name and the price he paid for the cloth!

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